

# Setting the policy agenda for cancer control reform: Australia's first national cancer control plan

Cancer outcomes in Australia are among the best in the world;<sup>1</sup> however, these outcomes are not experienced equitably. There are significant disparities in cancer outcomes and experience among specific groups in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>2</sup> Such disparities are unacceptable and require whole-of-system, coordinated, national level effort, to ensure the future of cancer control in Australia is one where world class cancer outcomes and experiences are within reach for all Australians.

In November 2020, the then Minister for Health and Aged Care asked Cancer Australia to lead the development of the Australian Cancer Plan, to provide an overarching national approach to cancer control that meets the needs of Australians now and in the future.

The Plan is a future-focused 10-year national framework that will accelerate world class cancer outcomes and improve the lives of all Australians affected by cancer. The Plan is designed as a digital platform and is accessible online at [www.australiancancerplan.gov.au](http://www.australiancancerplan.gov.au).

## Stakeholder engagement was critical to the Plan's development

From inception to delivery, a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy underpinned the development of the Plan. The Plan was co-designed, refined and tested in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders covering the breadth and depth of the cancer control and broader health sectors. Feedback was received via more than 700 submissions and consultations, encompassing more than 400 groups and 300 individuals. [Box 1](#) outlines the key stakeholder engagement activities throughout the Plan's development.

## Equity is at the heart of the Australian Cancer Plan

The Plan is designed to improve cancer outcomes for all Australians, and particularly for groups whose health outcomes are poorer. Achieving equity in cancer outcomes will be a fundamental measure of success for the Plan, aligning Australia with global calls to improve cancer outcomes for all people.<sup>3,4</sup> The Plan identifies ten priority population groups at greater risk of poorer outcomes. These groups were identified through stakeholder engagement activities, supported by an associated health equity in cancer outcomes framework. The ten priority population groups are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- adolescents and young adults;
- children;

- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- people living with disability;
- LGBTIQ+ people;
- people in lower socio-economic groups;
- people living with a mental illness;
- older Australians; and
- people living in rural and remote areas.

The Plan recognises that distinct disparities exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with cancer. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer, have poorer survival outcomes, and die from cancer when compared with non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>5</sup> The age-standardised mortality rate for all cancers combined for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increased by 26% between 1998 and 2015 and decreased for non-Indigenous people by 16% during the same period.<sup>6</sup>

Achieving equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the most significant ambition for the future of cancer care in Australia. Components of the Plan relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were developed through a co-design approach with Indigenous leaders comprising Cancer Australia's Leadership Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Control, jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policy representatives, and other representatives. The co-design approach to the development of the Plan aligned with best practice co-design principles.<sup>7</sup> As such, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives actively participated in key engagement activities, contributed to drafting and refining the 10-year ambition statements and the 2- and 5-year goals and actions, and reviewed draft Plan content.

## Introducing the Plan

The Plan identifies six strategic objectives that require national, coordinated leadership and concerted effort across the sector for the next decade to deliver world class cancer outcomes and experiences for all Australians ([Box 2](#)). Each strategic objective contains a 10-year ambition, and 2- and 5-year goals with associated actions.

The strategic objective "Achieving equity in cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" complements the ambitions, goals and actions identified for strategic objectives 1–5, which apply to all Australians including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Of the 46 actions in the Plan, all are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer

Daniel Chaji<sup>1</sup>

Anna Boltong<sup>1,2</sup>

Carolyn Der Vartanian<sup>1</sup>

Adam Lambert<sup>1</sup>

Cindy Toms<sup>1</sup>

Vivienne Milch<sup>1,3</sup>

Claire Howlett<sup>1</sup>

Dorothy Keefe<sup>1,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cancer Australia, Sydney, NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney, Sydney, NSW.

<sup>3</sup> Caring Futures Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide, SA.

<sup>4</sup> Adelaide Medical School, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA.

Daniel.Chaji@  
canceraustralia.  
gov.au

1 Key engagement activities underpinning Australian Cancer Plan development

Engagement forum (date)	Description	Respondents			Key outcome
		Organisations and/ or collaborations	Individuals	Attendees	
Ministerial Roundtable (April 2021)	Roundtable with invited stakeholders to gauge perspectives from across the cancer continuum on the key opportunities for a national cancer plan in Australia	-	-	65	Conceptual framework and principles underpinning the Plan agreed
Public consultation 1 (Nov 2021–Mar 2022)	Sought the public’s vision for a national cancer plan in Australia	136	139	-	Strategic objectives identified
Workshop series 1 (June 2022)	Six workshops with invited stakeholders to seek input into 10-year ambitions and 2- and 5-year goals for each strategic objective	-	-	96	Strategic objective ambitions and goals drafted
Targeted engagement period (July–Sept 2022)	Targeted engagement meetings with representatives of priority population groups and cancer consumer organisations	-	-	97	Number of priority population groups broadened, and evidence of population-specific care needs captured
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jurisdictional health representatives meeting (Aug 2022)	Meeting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jurisdictional health representatives to seek strategic input on how the Plan can achieve equitable cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	-	-	22	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific actions tailored according to gaps identified
Action prioritisation workshop (Aug 2022)	Workshop with Cancer Australia advisors to prioritise actions for inclusion in the Plan using a bespoke decision matrix	-	-	4	Top ranked actions using the decision matrix agreed through consensus
Co-design workshop with Cancer Australia Leadership Group (Sept 2022)	Workshop with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to prioritise actions specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for inclusion in the Plan using a bespoke decision matrix	-	-	4	Top ranked actions specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, using the decision matrix, agreed through consensus
Workshop series 2 (Aug–Sept 2022)	Six workshops with invited stakeholders to test the actions, and the refined 10-year ambitions and 2- and 5-year goals	-	-	101	Strategic objective ambitions and goals refined; actions tested and refined
Webinar series (Nov 2022)	Four public webinars to obtain targeted and real-time input on the draft Plan (three webinars aimed at consumers and multidisciplinary health professionals and one webinar aimed at cancer research sector)	-	-	135	Feedback from stakeholders to support Plan finalisation, implementation plan, and digital experience received
Public consultation 2 (Nov–Dec 2022)	Sought public feedback on the draft Plan	147	138	-	Key issues for further refinement identified

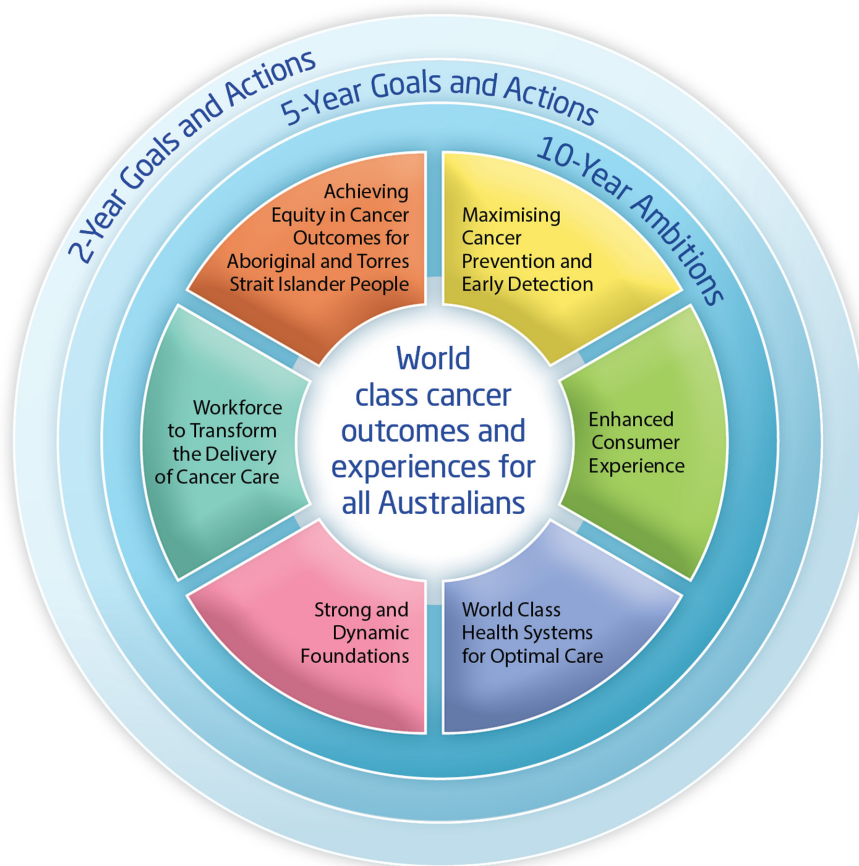
control and a third are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific.

Through identified activities, the Plan addresses contemporary, critical issues relevant to national level cancer control initiatives. These include health literacy,<sup>8</sup> particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other priority population groups, and health emergency preparedness arrangements,<sup>4,9</sup>

to mitigate and manage the impacts of public health emergencies including pandemics, extreme weather events, and other consequences of climate change on cancer control, care and service delivery.<sup>10-13</sup>

The Plan both leverages and supports existing national health strategies, together with other national, state and territory strategies supporting priority populations. Ensuring equity and access for all and

## 2 Australian Cancer Plan vision and strategic objectives



aligning with existing plans to achieve national health goals is in line with calls from international cancer control peak bodies,<sup>3,14</sup> including the World Health Organization's 2017 resolution on cancer prevention and control.<sup>15</sup>

The Plan will be reviewed after the 2-year and 5-year marks against the actions and goals set out to achieve the strategic objectives. Further actions may be considered for each strategic objective to ensure the Plan is on track to ultimately meet its 10-year ambitions and achieve the envisaged future state of cancer control in Australia.

### Future state of cancer control in Australia

The delivery of the Plan is an important milestone in cancer control policy for Australia. The Plan sets a national reform agenda to accelerate world class cancer outcomes and improve the lives of all Australians affected by cancer, so that everyone with a cancer diagnosis will experience their care free from discrimination and be served by a system that respects them personally, including their culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, health status, and education level.

Successful implementation of national cancer control depends on collaborative partnerships.<sup>16,17</sup> Implementation of the Plan is a shared responsibility and will require joint efforts from the entire cancer

control sector. An implementation plan has been developed and will continue to evolve over the 10-year life of the Plan.

Cancer Australia has invited, and continues to consult with, partners from across the Australian cancer control sector to consider their contribution to this national reform agenda and commit to actions to achieve the Plan's goals. Leadership on priority national actions will come from partners such as governments, non-government organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services and health organisations, and the health and research sectors. In line with implementation, the Australian Government has committed to prioritise and reorient existing programs, where appropriate, to ensure they are closely aligned with the Plan. Cancer Australia will support stakeholders to set common measures and build data collection capacity; will seek and share innovation including the rapid translation and application of research and evidence in all forms; and will identify, advocate for, and action shared priorities that require national approaches.

All involved in Australia's cancer control sector are invited to partner with the Australian Government and each other in pursuit of this ambitious national reform agenda. Cross-sector partnerships focused on achieving the Plan's goals and ambitions will

engender an integrated, accessible, equitable, and high quality cancer care system committed to world class cancer outcomes for all Australians affected by cancer.

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